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**‘KNITTING NEEDLES AND POPPYCOCK’: HITHERTO UNKNOWN
PROSE PIECES BY HART CRANE AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC
CLARIFICATIONS**

Between 1916 and 1932, before his untimely death aged 32, Hart Crane appeared in a wide range of transatlantic journals that were instrumental to the development of different strands of literary modernism. Crane’s bibliographers, Joseph Schwartz and Robert C. Schweik (1972) and H.D. Rowe (1955) have counted 105 periodical publications, as well as two volumes, and contributions to anthologies and pamphlets.¹ However, close examination of Crane’s periodical publications in my doctoral research has uncovered four further publications, and a significant amendment to an existing record. Crane’s known publications now amount to 109 appearances in 26 journals (88 poetry, 18 prose, 3 artworks), including three forgotten pieces of prose and a variant of the poem ‘Voyages IV’.²

¹ Joseph Schwartz and Robert C. Schweik, *Hart Crane: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972); H. D. Rowe, ‘Hart Crane: A Bibliography’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 1.2 (July 1955), pp. 94-113.

² My record of Crane’s periodical publications and rejections are detailed in my PhD thesis, *Hart Crane and the Little Magazine* (Durham University, 2017), pp. 239-247.

The first is a previously undocumented piece of literary criticism published in the December issue of Edwin Seaver's journal, *1924*. The text is titled 'Knitting Needles and Poppycock', and is signed with a pseudonym taken from Crane's poem 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen': 'Religious Gunman'.³ Next are two short reviews which were published anonymously in *The Dial*'s 'Briefer Mentions' feature in the March 1924 number. These are recorded in Nicholas Joost and Alvin Sullivan's 1971 pamphlet "*The Dial*", *Two Author Indexes: Anonymous and Pseudonymous Contributors; Contributors in Clipsheets*, but have not been mentioned in Crane's bibliographies or in critical studies.⁴ Crane reviews Romer Wilson's experimental 1923 novel *The Grand Tour*, and Thomas Moulton's anthology *The Best Poems of 1922*.⁵ In terms of clarifications, the December number of *1924* was also found to contain a variant of 'Voyages IV', under the title 'Voyages'.⁶ This publication does not appear in either of Crane's bibliographies, but has been documented by Marc Simon in *Samuel Greenberg, Hart Crane and the Lost Manuscripts*.⁷ Finally, examining *The Pagan* revealed that Crane wrote a longer section of the April-May 1918 review pages than those documented by

³ 'Religious Gunman' [Hart Crane], 'Knitting Needles and Poppycock', *1924*, 1.4 (December 1924), pp.136-39; the phrase appears in Crane, 'For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen', *Secession*, 1.7 (Winter 1923-24), pp. 1-4 (p.3), l. 6.

⁴ Nicholas Joost and Alvin Sullivan's pamphlet, "*The Dial*", *Two Author Indexes: Anonymous and Pseudonymous Contributors; Contributors in Clipsheets* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1971), p. 15; These are not catalogued by Barbara Zingman in "*The Dial*": *An Author Index* (New York: Whitsun, 1975).

⁵ Crane, 'Romer Wilson, *The Grand Tour*', review of Romer Wilson, *The Grand Tour of Alphonse Marichaud* (1923), *The Dial*, 76.3 (March 1924), p. 198; Crane, 'Thomas Moulton, *The Best Poems of 1922*', review of Thomas Moulton, *The Best Poems of 1922* (1923), *ibid.*, p. 200.

⁶ Crane, 'Voyages' ['Voyages IV'], *1924*, 1.4 (December 1924), p. 119.

⁷ Marc Simon, *Samuel Greenberg, Hart Crane and the Lost Manuscripts* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), p. 61.

Schwartz and Schweik, with a different title (this review is not listed in H.D. Rowe's earlier bibliography).⁸

'Knitting Needles and Poppycock' was published in the December number of *1924*, a short-lived literary journal edited by Edwin Seaver and his partner, A. Vera Bass, from the 'artistic and literary' community of Woodstock, upstate New York. Funded by Crane's benefactor, Otto Kahn, *1924* aimed to publish 'vital and inevitable' new work in poetry, fiction, and literary criticism, while it also included some prints by local visual artists.⁹

Seaver used *1924* to continue the lively debates between contributors to *Broom* and *Secession*, which had both ceased publishing earlier that year. Termed 'exile journals' by Malcolm Cowley, these were edited by U.S. writers, but based in continental Europe. Both journals had close ties with European avant-gardes, but their different affiliations, and different understandings of how U.S. writers might deal with 'machine age' subjects, prompted lively debates between the two publications that were reignited in *1924* – including in Crane's 'Knitting Needles and Poppycock'.¹⁰ Their debates revolved around the importance of form, and mirrored the 1922 arguments between André Breton and Tristan Tzara over the split between Dada and proto-Surrealism. Broadly, Gorham Munson intended for *Secession* to be a 'technical journal', and he advocated for the formal integration of 'machine age' ideas following proto-Surrealist principles of juxtaposed metaphor, to avoid simply 'putting

⁸ Crane, 'Tragi-Comique', *The Pagan*, 2.12-3.1 (April-May 1918), pp. 54-56.

⁹ Edwin Seaver, 'Why *1924*', *1924*, 1.1 (July 1924), p. 33.

¹⁰ The term 'machine age', as it relates to the arts, was used as early as 1915 in Paul L. Haviland, 'We are Living in the Age of the Machine', *291*, 1.7-8 (September 1915), p. 1.

automobile goggles on Proteus'.¹¹ Matthew Josephson (formerly an editor of *Secession*, moving to *Broom* in 1923) was 'machine loving' – as assistant editor Cowley put it, commenting on Josephson's editing tastes.¹² Josephson rejected Munson's 'pedantry', and was more interested in a panegyric, 'American Futurist' mode: 'alliteration' and 'assonance with typographical arrangements' would be sufficient to 'give new visual and auditory sensations to the reader', he wrote.¹³ The positions of the two journals were so distinct that their respective contributors became known as 'Secessionists' and 'Broomides'. Arguments in print continued well into the 1930s, and were restated in their editors' respective autobiographies.¹⁴ The two factions even came to blows during a failed reconciliatory meeting (fuelled by prohibition moonshine) in New York City in 1924, while their editors performed a theatrical 'duel' in upstate New York a fortnight later.¹⁵

1924's last number, in which Crane's 'Knitting Needles and Poppcock' appeared, was dominated by critical essays on form that spoke to the arguments between Munson and Josephson, apparently siding with Munson. The issue included Waldo Frank and Cowley's heated 'Communications on Seriousness and Dada', Seaver's 'Against the Tyranny of Rhetoric', and William Carlos Williams's review of Robert McAlmon's *Portrait of a Generation*, which

¹¹ Gorham Munson, 'The Mechanics for a Literary Secession', *S4N*, 3.21 (November 1922), pp. 1-9 (p. 8); Munson, 'Interstice between Scylla and Charybdis', *Secession*, 1.2 (July 1922), pp. 30-32 (p. 30).

¹² Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), p. 275.

¹³ Matthew Josephson, 'Apollinaire: Or Let Us Be Troubadours', *Secession*, 1.1 (April 1922), pp. 9-13 (p. 12).

¹⁴ Munson, *The Awakening Twenties* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Josephson, *Life Among the Surrealists* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston: 1962); Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994).

¹⁵ Cowley, *Exile's Return*, pp. 180-185; on these arguments as a marketing tool see Munson, 'How to Run a Little Magazine', *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 15.22 (26 March 1937), pp. 3-4 and 14.

carefully considers McAlmon's 'disordered' poetic forms and rhythms.¹⁶ Crane's piece enters into the arguments between *Broom* and *Secession* via an attack on Amy Lowell, who had recently penned an article in *The New Republic* that attempted to stake out 'Two Generations in American Poetry', and in which she admonished the 'Secessionists' for being overly interested in form and 'structure...theories'.¹⁷ Crane retorts by criticising Lowell's lack of formal dexterity:

Amy Lowell has never eradicated her early defects, has always been tethered to them, and consequently has failed to rise far enough above them. She has advanced to a mere intricate verbalism... Rhyme, for instance, is still the banana skin upon which she skips into banality or silliness.¹⁸

The faintest of praise comes only when Crane makes note of Lowell's abandonment of the 'too rigid' forms of poetry in her 'oratorical prose', although he finds it 'mellifluous' and unvaried, 'pictorial, pageant-like, decorative – and shallow. Her art is sensuous but it carries very little intellect and very little emotion.' 'Basically', Crane concludes, 'Amy Lowell is a sentimental esthete'.¹⁹ For Crane – who wrote his own 'General Aims and Theories', and had a letter to Harriet Monroe published in *Poetry* defending the theoretical considerations behind his use of metaphor – Lowell had failed to properly experiment with poetic form, advancing through her career to simply

¹⁶ Seaver, 'Against the Tyranny of Rhetoric', 1924, 1.4 (December 1924), pp. 120-123; William Carlos Williams, 'Portrait of a Generation', review of Robert McAlmon, *Portrait of a Generation*, *ibid.*, pp. 143-145; Waldo Frank and Cowley, 'Communications on Seriousness and Dada', *ibid.*, pp. 140-142.

¹⁷ Amy Lowell, 'Two Generations in American Poetry', *The New Republic*, 37.470 (5 December 1923), pp. 1-3.

¹⁸ Crane, 'Knitting Needles and Poppycock', p. 137.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

‘a more intricate’, but ill-conceived ‘verbalism’ (by contrast, perhaps, to his own densely complex metaphors which operated according to a system that was, at least for Crane, underpinned by a clear ‘logic’ of ‘association’).²⁰

Crane knew that his choice of pseudonym, ‘Religious Gunman’, would be easily discernible for Seaver’s coterie of readers. It was taken from his three-part poem ‘For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen’, published in fragmentary forms in *Broom* and *Secession* due to a combination of miscommunication and editing interventions. Furthermore, the poem’s aesthetic mediated between the visions of Josephson and Munson.²¹

Crane’s authorship is also coyly hinted at in a short prologue to the article – a parodic editorial note penned by either Seaver or Bass, or Crane himself. It states that the piece was ‘found in a bottle’ of ‘Gordon’s Dry Gin’ and, in a nod to Crane’s ‘Voyages’ poem in the same number, adds that ‘Should any of our readers rescue other bottles containing manuscripts [...] bobbing about upon this immense and frothing Sea’, then they were to ‘send them to 1924.’²² Crane’s heavy drinking habits were well known in literary circles (with H.P. Lovecraft mordantly remarking that Crane had ‘an unfortunate predilection for wine when it is red’).²³ While retaining a veneer of anonymity, the pseudonym worked within the coded language of this particular coterie that utilised their own specialist discourses on ‘machine age’ literature, and regularly pitted itself against an elder generation of poets and critics. As

²⁰ Crane, *ibid.*, p. 137; ‘General Aims and Theories’, ‘General Aims and Theories’, *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters of Hart Crane*, ed. by Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), pp. 160-164; Crane and Harriet Monroe, and Harriet Monroe, ‘A Discussion with Hart Crane’, *Poetry*, 29.1 (October 1926), pp. 34-41.

²¹ As I argue in my PhD thesis, *Hart Crane and the Little Magazine*.

²² Unsigned, ‘Prologue’ to ‘Knitting Needles and Poppycok’, p. 136.

²³ H.P. Lovecraft as quoted in Paul Mariani, *The Broken Tower: The Life of Hart Crane* (London: W.W. Norton, 1999), p. 165.

Munson said in 1922 apropos *Secession*, '[it] aims to be the first gun of the younger generation', providing 'hilarious comment' on established journals and writers.²⁴

Crane's 'Briefer Mentions', in reviewing the works of others, are revealing of his ideas about his own poetry. His review of Wilson's *The Grand Tour* Crane praises the 'piling up constantly to the end' of her 'etchings, moods and anecdotes', while the Romantic flights ('this Elysian wind that sets my nerves quivering like an Aeolian harp', 'I soar up into the blue sky') that pattern the novel may have appealed to Crane as he continued with work on his long poem, *The Bridge*.²⁵ Crane's antipathy to the work published in Thomas Moul's *Best Poems of 1922* is similarly revealing. The anthology contained 'broadly accessible poetry', showcasing the Georgians, but complemented by appearances from Richard Aldington, Carl Sandburg, H. D. and Amy Lowell.²⁶ Moul notes the magazine source for each poem, with the majority of the American work coming from *Poetry* and *The Dial*. Crane found Moul's selections conservative, noting that the anthology would only 'confuse or destroy what incipient taste for contemporary poetry its more occasional readers may be nursing.'²⁷ 'Knitting Needles and Poppycock' and the 'Briefer Mentions' emerge precisely at the time he was beginning to articulate his own poetic ideas in letters and essays. While 'General Aims and Theories' were not published during Crane's lifetime, a defence of his poetry appeared alongside his poem 'At Melville's Tomb' in *Poetry* in 1926, and his thoughts on 'Modern Poetry'

²⁴ Munson, 'Secession Announcement', c. Spring 1922, box 1, folder 1, Hart Crane and Family Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University.

²⁵ Crane, 'rev. *The Grand Tour*', p. 198; Romer Wilson, *The Grand Tour* (London: Methuen and Co, 1923), p. 21.

²⁶ *The Best Poems of 1922*, ed. by Thomas Moul (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1969), pp. vii-xiii.

²⁷ Crane, 'rev. *The Best Poems of 1922*', p. 200.

appeared in Oliver Sayler's critical anthology, *Revolt in the Arts* in 1930.

On 'Tragi-Comique' and 'The Last Chord': there is what initially looks like a typical example of epigram, which are frequently scattered throughout *The Pagan*:

Tragi-comique:

The most artistic war-poster on Fifth Avenue was made by a pacifist.²⁸ But this pithy note appears to be either the title and opening of the next section of the review pages, or at least to direct its content. The copy of *The Pagan* I consulted at the Beinecke appears to be that used by Schwartz and Schweik, with pencil marks at the beginning of a section beginning at the penultimate paragraph of page 55, and ending on page 56. In fact, it would appear that Crane's section of the review starts on page 54 at this sardonic epigram, which relates to his comments on a play, *Pan and the Young Shepherd*. Clearly linking the ironic observation 'on Fifth Avenue', Crane writes of the play:

[It] is a comedy in the same same sense that a college-professor of literature is a comedy: not because he says humorous or witty things (God forbid), but because he is so grave, and self-important, and sanctimonious.

There are no further signatures between the section signed 'A Pagan Knight' on page 54 and 'HC' on page 56.

As well as uncovering new works by Crane and useful clarifications to his bibliographic record, reading his work within its original periodical contexts enables new light to be shed on his poetic development and reception by showing the extent to which Crane's poetry was informed by contemporaneous

²⁸ Crane, 'Tragi-Comique', p. 54.

experiments in literary journals, and the ways in which his journal publications, reviews of his work, and relationships with editors informed the way his poetry was immediately received, setting up patterns that can even be detected in later criticism. The key discovery here, ‘Knitting Needles and Poppycock’, demonstrates how this poet who claimed he did not wish to be part of ‘any group’ would, yet, interject on behalf of both Munson and Josephson.²⁹ Crane has often been (and still is) charged with ‘unintelligibility’, that his metaphors create a ‘confused’, ‘snarled’ ‘thicket’ of ‘dense poetic tropes’.³⁰ These ideas tap into, as Thomas Yingling has put it, his ‘alienation’ from contemporary critics as a result of a common perception of his ‘inability to command a tradition of texts that defined literary competence’.³¹ Or, perhaps, his inability to rationally devise a complex poetic strategy such as the ‘logic of metaphor’ with limited formal academic training. In fact, these reviews show that Crane was carefully thinking through these ideas of form even before the defensive letter he penned to Monroe in 1926. In his castigation of what he sees as Lowell’s reluctance to apply her ‘intellect’ to her consideration of form, and (crucially for a poet so interested in densely packed, complex metaphors) questions her ‘verbalism’, and in his praise of the ‘piling up constantly’ of images in Wilson, the tentative beginnings of Crane’s own poetic theories can be seen to emerge.

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²⁹ Crane to Munson, 25 May, 1922, *O My Land, My Friends: The Selected Letters of Hart Crane*, ed. by Langdon Hammer and Brom Weber (New York: Four Walls, 1997), pp. 86-88 (p. 88).

³⁰ Max Eastman, ‘The Cult of Unintelligibility’, *Harper’s Magazine*, 158.947 (April 1929), pp. 632-39; Moore, ‘A Discussion with Hart Crane’, p. 35; Brian Reed, *Hart Crane: After his Lights* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), p. 101.

³¹ Thomas E. Yingling, *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 63.